MOTHERHOOD, APPLE PIE AND REVOLUTION
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In a delightful little book "The Trouble With Being a Mama", Eva Rutland introduces her topic this way:

> The trouble with being a mama is, you worry too much. You worry about why Tommy spits up his milk, why Archie sucks his thumb, why Doris has no dates and Patty too many, how to get children who don't like eggs to eat good solid breakfasts, how to stretch the budget to include those nourishing eggs they leave on their plates, how to calm a husband who doesn't like eggs left on plates that a budget had to be stretched to include, why other kids look so scrubbed and yours look so grimy, why someone doesn't invent sneakers that don't make feet sweat, how to get a bass fiddle and a four-foot boy to school together without carrying them yourself, how to discipline Billy without warping his personality, how to keep your husband from warping Billy's personality, how to iron blouses with no cat-faces....
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> My trouble is I wasn't trained to be a mama - not the worrying type, anyway. My mama never worried. Oh, about fundamental things like how to pay the bills and what to cook for dinner. But about children, no. You bathed 'em, you fed 'em, you made 'em behave - and that was it."

The author goes on to describe her mother's method of solving the problem of thumb sucking, which was to tie said thumb to the bed post - and stealing,which was to have the culprit wear a blind fold for three hours. There was no connection whatever between the offense and the punishment - it was totally unsound psychologically and the only thing that could be said about it was that it worked. (P11-13,exerpts)

The trouble with being a mother is that there are so many experts and so much new knowledge and so many sources of edification and advise that it is almost impossible to feel good about oneself - and not worry. And at this point, I wish to make one thing totally clear. The job of parenting is not a mama's job: it is a shared task, and even though this is specifically Mother's Day, my comments this morning are intended to be shared by all who find themselves involved in families - which means everyone here.

In any case, mothers worry a lot today, and so do fathers. That is the first reality on the agenda. The second is a movement that has ellecited wildly different responses in all of us - Women's Liberation. Men applaud some of it, laugh at some of it, and tremble in fear at some of it. Eva Rutland wrote her book long ago - in 1966: and in the intervening 6 years some women have called into question the whole concept of the family and the traditional roles of Motherhood: some very articulate women have said some things that needed to be said about the legal status of women in our culture, financial renumeration, the freedom to be a person, the right to be accepted as a person apart from taking the minutes and making the coffee. For many women it has been like a breath of fresh air, for others it has meant the amplification of frustration and tension. And generally mothers have looked seriously at the role our society has assigned them and discovered that in the context of parenting, they have gotten the heavy end of the burden.

And so, on this day that celebrates - in a real sense - a past phenomenum - Motherhood and Apple Pie , .only the blind will fail to acknowledge that we are in the midst of a revolution, like it or not. It is a rather unique time to be a Mother - for a Father - or a family: a time,I believe filled with creative possibility and potential.

And as we reflect together, let us look quickly at the Biblical basis - the tradition - the word. In the Bible the family is not accidental: it is not simply a convenient living arrangement for the purpose of propogating the race, although it has performed that function rather effectively. So effectively in fact that humanity has accomplished the good and has been faithful to God's command to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. One ecologist laments that this is the only divine instruction men have taken seriously.

In any case the Bible says some rather clear things about families and parents. Our Lord described the Genesis of the family in terms of a man leaving father and mother and being joined to his wife: and the two become one flesh. Now, that phrase - repeated over and over in the marriage ceremoney is as worn as an old shoe. But

I believe it contains a very radical definition of the marital and family relationship: namely that individuals - for the sake of the new reality - the new being - sacrifice individuality. That does not mean that we stop being ourselves - that we sacrifice all that makes us what we are. It does mean that we sense ourselves growing into something that is bigger than both of us - and that our individuality is preserved and enhanced in the intimacy of relationship. Marriage and the family, that is to say, are at the very heart of God's plan for his children.

The Bible, in the Ten Commandments, the basis of Israel's Covenant with God, the basis of the nations law, includes honoring one's parents. And in the New Testament St. Paul advises children to obey their parents, and parents not to provoke their children - which says something about communication and the spirit of reconciliation which must be a part of the project.

In summary, when we discuss the task of being parents and children - families - in the context of the Bible, we are talking about a very important and fundamental and creative matter.

And yet, the family seems to be in big trouble today. If you read at all you know that every major magazine keeps returning to the topic, that their are literally thousands of books diagnosing and analyzing our dilemna, that we are doing a lot of hand wringing over the failure and fragility of the home and traditional family. To that vast library of literature I would add three reflections.

First the family that is in trouble today is the nuclear family: Mother, Father and children isolated from aunts, uncles, cousins and grandparents. Margaret Mead observes that the nuclear family is not old and venerable institution. It is a new invention, and a bad one. The honesty of that observation was illustrated to me again last week. I received a phone call from my Mother who was hit by a car on Thursday, sustained some cuts and bruises and was not, thankfully, injured seriously. But it was a frightening experience -- and it occurred to me again that she lives in a city where she has lived all her life - and that at a distance of 550 miles I am her closest relative. The nuclear family means that there is, for many people no one to turn to when the chips are down, no one to be there and share and laugh

and cry and pour the coffee. And the added pressures put on the nuclear family - the isolated unit are more than it can stand.

The second reflection has to do with "the Gap", a gap that is now generational but only by accident. I have come to understand that the real gap - the chasm that divides our culture is World War II. Time is divided by that event: people are divided between those who were born before it and those born after it. For, in a real sense, we are talking about two different nations two totally different experiences, two different cultures, when we reflect on that dividing line. Never, in the entire history of mankind, has so much happened in one generation: never has the rate of change been so rapid: from Kerosene lamps to television: from horse and buggy to Appollo 16. Those old enough to have lived through all or part of it have had to be the most adaptable, flexible people ever to inhabit the earth. Middle aged and elderly people aren't rigid and unbending on measure. Quite to the contrary; and everytime I talk to someone who can recall the old and live gracefully with the new I am moved to want to congratulate them simply for assimilating so much. It is no mean accomplishment!

What it means though is that now - at this particular point in time, our children are the natives in this brand new land, and those of us born prior to 1945 are immigrants, newcomers thrust by history into a brand new situation. They are the ones born here: they know how to use the tools: they feel the new world view: they know, significantly, the language. Speaking at Purdue, C.B.S. Correspondent Douglas Edwards reminised about the day not long ago when 'pot' was for cooking a chicken, 'grass' was for watering and trimming, "fuzz" grew on a peach, 'flaky" described pie crust, juice came from oranges, "sauce basted the turkey, and "busted" was something that happened to a window when you played ball close to the house. If you know what those terms mean today - you are becoming 'naturalized': if you have to think or you don't know, you - as I am many times - are an immigrant who doesn't know the language.

Margaret Mead compares us with the first settlers who came to the strange and sometimes alien land, who didn't know how to build log cabins, or even how to wield

an axe: and suggests that our job is the same as theirs: to build what we can, to leave something firm and stable for the natives - the first born - our children.

The third reflection is that parents are miserable today. Nobody seems to feel good about being parents - everybody seems to be ready to be self-accusing, self-deprecating - and inadequate. No young people in history have felt that their parents were doing a good job: but here, in the mid twentith century American culture we have become a generation of parents who agree. If something goes wrong,we assume automatically that the parents are at fault: kids are always good and right and pure. That contrasts sharply with the traditional British view that children are essentially monsters to be managed, shackled and tolerated. Now, this is not to minimize the tremendous responsibilities of parenthood. It is to acknowledge that sometimes loving, sensitive, intelligent parents raise children that somehow come out wrongly. It is to suggest that children are people too, and that if John Calvin was right, in any sense of the word, children are as capable of selfishness, arrogance, thoughtlessness as adults. It is to say that all of us need to relax - that we are probably doing a pretty fair job - that our best is, in fact, enough.

Now, what light can be shed on our situation by the resources of Christian Faith? Quite a bit, I believe. For I assume that the intimate relationships of the family serve as an amplifier to both our strengths and weaknesses as persons. That is to say, our families provide the laboratory experience for the practice of our faith. If we have trouble loving other people - that inability will be felt most severely by our families. If we feel guilty and inadequate about ourselves, we may be able to function in the world of business, but not at closer range with our children. If we cannot forgive and sense our own forgiveness - we may be able to live in the world as a cold, remote type of person and get away with it, but not with our own children.

I have nothing new and startling to offer: but I would suggest that some very old and traditional words become new and startling when we exercise them with our families. There is no one here who has not been kind and patient and understanding with every single person he has encountered all day - except his wife or her husband,

or their children. Words like respect and forgiveness and acceptance come to mind here. We need most of all to learn to extend to each other in our families - those graceful gifts of love - that we try to hard to extend to everyone else.

Forgiveness-acceptance: I think that is most important of all. Love Story was dead wrong: love does not mean never having to say you're sorry. Quite the opposite, it means saying it over and over again for the small ways we hurt and fail each other. It means accepting each other as persons - mothers and fathers and children and giving each other the graceful gift of acceptance.

For parents, it means living gracefully with the fact that our children will not be carbon copies of ourselves: in fact they may not be like us at all for they are natives in the new land we have made for them. It means hearing them when they affirm their personhood and not failing over the inconsequential matters of hair and music and clothing styles.

For young people, adolescents, it means loving by accepting the individuality and personhood of parents: by realizing on occassion that they are people too: that they stumble and fail and make mistakes and need to be forgiven - and loved for who they are.

The Christian faith, finally, places each of us in a very special relationship, with God through Jesus Christ, and because of that, in a new relationship with each other. God's intention for his church is that it become a community of caring people who love, accept and support each other.

Our children need the people of this church: they need the aunts and uncles and cousins and grandparents whom God has provided at this time and place. And we need each other - to share our deepest concerns - to help and support each other. The church can be that for all of us: it is that for many of us.

Motherhood, Apple Pie and Revolution. It's a good and exciting time to be a mother or a father - even a child. AMEN

Father, we are grateful for the gift of our families: help us to relax and enjoy them. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. AMEN